

Proposal for a Willing Seller – Willing Buyer Program for:

1. Drainage Reduction 2. Delta Ecosystem Restoration and 3. Water Supply Reliability

*Prepared by the Planning and Conservation League
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Summary

The Bay Delta ecosystem is in critical decline with one fish species, Delta Smelt, currently approaching extinction and several others designated as threatened. Because scientists have identified water export operations as one probable cause, significant cutbacks in exports to many areas of California have already begun and are likely continue for the foreseeable future.

Some of the water exported from the Delta is used to irrigate drainage-impaired lands in the Westlands Water District. Without a solution, more and more of this land will go out of production over time. To date no feasible long term drainage solution has been identified.

This proposal is for a willing seller - willing buyer purchase of the contractual water entitlement held by the Westlands Water District. That water would be dedicated to environmental uses in the Delta. Because that would contribute to a healthier Delta ecosystem, all other Delta water users would be able to continue most, if not all, of their current exports.

Because there would no longer be a need to supply water to those drainage-impaired lands, significant storage would be freed up in San Luis Reservoir, a major south of Delta, off-stream surface water reservoir. This would facilitate “opportunistic pumping” as well as increased south of Delta emergency water storage.

In addition, elimination of drainage from these lands would improve water quality for in-Delta uses as well as for those residents and businesses in Southern California and the San Francisco Bay Area who receive some of their water from the Delta.

Provisions would be included to address third party impact and provide benefits for disadvantage communities in the area.

Lastly, resolution of the immediate Delta ecosystem crisis would allow all parties to work together to implement mid- and long-term Delta solutions.

The fair market cost would be determined and independently verified by established appraisal processes. However it is likely to be less costly than other single purpose alternatives which would provide significantly fewer benefits.

Who is Looking at This Proposal?

This proposal is being reviewed by the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and the Santa Clara Valley Water District. Copies have been provided to Westlands Water District, other water agencies, Governor Schwarzenegger's Office, the Bay Delta Authority, the California Department of Water Resources, the State Water Resources Control Board, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force, and representatives of the Environmental Justice community.

Preliminary List of Remaining Issues

What Congressional and State actions would be required to allow acquisition of the contractual entitlement?

What Congressional and State action would be required to assure that the water would remain in the Delta for ecosystem purposes?

What other options exist for the land, e.g. solar production?

How would land ownership be considered in the purchase?

What, if any, land management would be required to avoid creation of adverse impacts (e.g. dust)?

What opportunities exist or could be created to mitigate third party impacts?

What opportunities exist or could be created to provide benefits to disadvantaged communities in the region?

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